

**Human Right Commission
June 2, 2009 Meeting Minutes**

Members Present: Mary Bixby, Negar Jackson, Jessica Macy, Al Terrill, Mark Thomas, Marissa Todd

Members Excused: Glenn Glasgow

Staff Present: Steve Hollis, Marie Glaze, Shawna Victor, Fred Boeckmann

Others Present:

- I. **Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. Todd introduced herself to the commission.
- II. **Approval of Agenda:** Bixby made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion was seconded by Jackson and passed unanimously.
- III. **Approval of May 5, 2009 meeting minutes:** Bixby made a correction to the last paragraph on the last page. Staff noted the correction and will make the change in the final draft of the May minutes. Bixby made a motion to approve the amended May 5, 2009 meeting minutes. The motion was seconded by Jackson and passed unanimously.
- IV. **Old Business:** Glaze said in response to the Domestic Partnership Registry recently passed by the Columbia City Council the Westboro Baptist Church, a hate group from Topeka, Kansas, picketed in Columbia on May 14, 2009. The Human Rights Commission and Office of Community Services hosted a screening of the film "Fall from Grace" and a panel discussion on May 13, 2009. This documentary was shown in an effort to share some of the history, message and tactics of the group. The panel discussion was intended to offer information as to why the City was encouraging people to stay away from the Westboro picket sites. This was also an opportunity to learn the facts about the City of Columbia's Domestic Partnership Registry as well as the Human Rights Ordinance, which covers sexual orientation as a protected class. Thomas was a panelist at this event.

On Thursday, May 14, an alternative event was held at Missouri United Methodist Church in an effort to divert attention from the Westboro picket. This was a peaceful gathering of over 150 people from across the community who came together to demonstrate Columbia's commitment to diversity and inclusion. On May 19 the Office of Community Services co-hosted a Community Discussion at Missouri United Methodist Church. The discussion centered on tolerance and inclusion as it relates to sexual orientation.

Glaze noted she was at both picket sites, in front of the Boone Building and the Missouri United Methodist Church, as well as the alternative event. There was a large presence of people from the faith community at the alternative event. When the Westboro group arrived at the church, the pastor rang the church bells and a group of people attending the alternative event turned their backs to the Westboro group. She believes the LGBT community felt the support from the community.

Thomas said the film screening was well attended. He was pleased to see how well the LGBT community mobilized to coordinate alternative events and believes the Human Rights Commission played an integral roll in this. It is his opinion that United Missouri Methodist Church decision to move forward with their event somewhat tied the hands of other organizations to plan an event away from the picket. Because of this, he believes the commission had no choice but to participate.

Glaze noted the reason, she believes, Pastor Jim Bryan wanted to have the event was because the Missouri United Methodist Church was specifically targeted. Dick Blount, who is a retired minister in their congregation, spoke out in support of the Domestic Partnership

Registry. There is also an Open Door Ministry at the church.

Hollis said he and others had expressed concerns about the event being held at the church as the City tries to honor the separation of church and state. He did e-mail Pastor Bryan the day after the planning expressing concerns about having the event at the church because of this issue and because it was where the picketers were scheduled to be and the reason for having an alternative event is to be away from the picket. Also, he had concerns about this becoming a Christian event. Pastor Bryan's response was very passionate. In a conversation with Dick Blount, Hollis learned it was very important issue for Pastor Bryan to have an event because of the church's stance on welcoming those from the LGBT community. Hollis felt because of this there was no choice but to be involved in the church's event. It is to his understanding there were a few students that were not comfortable with having the event at a church but they still did gather peacefully outside the church

Thomas said the students he spoke with felt welcome and believes Pastor Bryan went out of his way to make the students feel welcome. Pastor Bryan encouraged parishioners to stay in the church during the protest.

Glaze noted that Pastor Bryan has a friend who is a bishop of a congregation. The bishop's sons were both homosexual and both have passed away. Pastor Phelps went to the congregation and told this bishop that he would soon be joining his sons in hell. She believes this is another reason behind Pastor Bryan wanting to have an event at his church.

Glaze noted the follow up event was not as well attended but there was a lively discussion. She hopes to have some recommendations come out of that group regarding policy. There will be additional meetings to continue the discussions.

Hollis said staff created dialogue questions for the follow up event focusing on the action that could be taken at the individual, business, community, City and State levels. They wanted people to walk away from the event with the feeling they could make recommendations to make our community, state and nation more inclusive of the protected class of sexual orientation.

Thomas said PrideFest is June 13. Hollis said the Department of Public Health and Human Services will have a booth at the event.

- V. New Business:** Thomas suggested having some type of training for the commissioners regarding the investigative process. He would like the training to include all levels: local, state and federal. Also, to learn more about the Missouri Commission on Human Rights (MCHR) such as their investigative process and this commission's efforts to coordinate trainings for the public.

Jackson and Macy agreed this would be a good idea.

Hollis said he would like to have someone from MCHR come to a commission meeting soon, perhaps the July meeting. Staff will try to have someone from EEOC and HUD attend a future meeting. MCHR can act on behalf of EEOC and HUD.

Staff was thinking about having MCHR do more of a technical training such as what they cover with MCHR new staff and how they interact with EEOC and HUD.

Hollis said there is no training for staff regarding investigations either so this would also benefit staff. He would also like to develop a training Glaze can do with newly appointed commissioners.

Thomas asked if Boeckmann could also give a brief history of the Human Rights ordinance and commission, and how cases would proceed through the court system if the case did get that far.

VI. Staff Reports

- A. Community Services:** Hollis reviewed the RFP process for the Human Rights Enhancement Funding. Through the HREP, the City contracts for services in order to satisfy the educational component of the Human Rights ordinance. Staff issues the RFP, which has specific guidelines for what the City would purchase for human rights educational programs. Those proposals are reviewed by staff and distributed to the commission. The commission then holds a public hearing and makes funding recommendations to council. There has been a little over \$5,000 available the last few years.

Hollis said Council has requested information from departments regarding mandated, contracted and non-mandated programs. After reviewing this information, Council has specifically requested additional information on the Human Rights Enhancement Funding program and the Diversity Celebration. There will be budget cuts for the upcoming year and possible next few years.

- B. Law Department:** There will be a special City Council meeting June 8 for a public hearing for the proposed Citizen Review Board. Thomas said he will be attending.

- C. Human Rights Specialist:** On May 12th Glaze attended the Human Resources Association's "2009 Labor & Employment Law Update: Keeping Your Organization out of Court" meeting. The featured guest, Michael Blumenthal a Kansas City attorney, is apparently a regular as many of those in attendance seemed to be well acquainted with him. His presentation was very interesting and informative. Staff is currently planning a joint effort with the group (Human Resources Association) for an employment training on August 11th. Glaze thanked Commissioner Bixby for suggesting we contact this organization.

On Thursday, May 14th Glaze and Hollis attended the Columbia Public Schools Partners in Education 25th Anniversary Celebration.

On Saturday, May 16th, Glaze was a part of the Heritage Festival at Douglass Park. Glaze passed at information about human rights services and had available information about the Domestic Partnership Registry.

On Thursday, May 21st Glaze attended a Community Network Meeting. This is a group that meets periodically throughout the year to work on making the community more friendly for youth with disabilities and their parents.

Staff continues to receive inquiries about complaints. There were two inquiries this month about the police which were referred to other agencies after explaining HRC does not have jurisdiction. One Housing complaint was filed.

- VII. Public Comment:** There was no public comment.

- VIII. Commissioner Comment:** Thomas suggested the commissioners contact their city council member to let them know how important it is to continue the Human Rights Enhancement Funding.

Thomas noted he believes the media coverage of the Westboro protest was well balanced as the Commission had requested in their press release.

- IX. Closed Session to Discuss Pending Cases Pursuant to Section 610.021 (1) RSMo.:**
Jackson made a motion to move to closed session to discuss cases pursuant to Section 610.021(1) RSMo. The motion was seconded by Bixby and a roll call vote was taken. Jackson called the roll with the following vote: Bixby – Aye, Jackson – Aye, Macy – Aye, Terrill – Aye, Thomas – Aye, Todd – Aye.
- X. Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Steve Hollis, Manager

Office of Community Services